

## Single Parenting Effects on the Child's Psychological Development

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### Abstract

*The current study examined the impact of single parenting on the child's psychological development in Sokoto Metropolis. The study was guided by three main research objectives which corresponded with three research questions, it adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of all the parents in Sokoto Metropolis Sokoto state. Glen Formula was used in selecting a sample of 325, simple frequency distribution tables were used in data analysis. it was revealed that the highest mean in this category was stating that the child feels unhappy with an incomplete family or separation of parents. The lowest mean of which provides that the child also shows a negative emotional profile; the developmental effect of single parenting in the child had the highest mean of where the child demonstrated difficulty in developing personal identity and displayed physical stress from taking over the responsibilities. The findings of the study showed that majority of children in Sokoto are perceived to be stable, open communication is a factor that contribute to psychological development, finally the study recommended that single parents should patronize open communication with their children to foster emotional stability and self-esteem.*

**Keywords:** Psychological, Child, Development, Single, Parents, Emotions

## **Introduction**

The traditional paradigm of the nuclear family has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, leading researchers to examine how diverse household dynamics influence the emotional and cognitive growth of offspring. Understanding these shifts is crucial for identifying the specific environmental factors that shape a child's mental health and long-term resilience. Central to this discourse is the increasing prevalence of households led by a solitary caregiver, a configuration that presents unique challenges and socio-economic realities. Jones & Watson (2021), describes a family structure known as single parenthood as a structure that occurs when one parent raises and cares for one or more children alone, without the assistance of a partner or spouse.

Parenting, according to (Adegoke, 2023), refers to the process of raising and caring for children from birth to adulthood, a good parental upbringing provides the child with necessary physical emotional, social and cognitive support that help in shaping a child into a meaningful citizen in the community, thereby making him a well-adjusted and productive individual.

Child development refers to the biological and psychological changes that an adoptive parent nurtures and raises the offspring of the biological parent, but it does not progress from dependency to increasing autonomy. Emotional bond between caregiver and the child, according to Bornstein, (2020), allows the child to learn to understand and manage his emotions, build self-concept and at the same time develop resilience.

Related terms include developmental Rudimentary Problems attached to the single parenthood still attached to single parent state regardless of how it was acquired -Single parents play the role of the father and mother have someone with whom to discuss problems that may arise concerning the health, school rearing role conflicting with work expectations. Generally, receive a healthier economic status than their female counterparts.

Single parenting can have diverse impacts on child psychological development, with both potential challenges and opportunities. While some children may experience increased anxiety, behavioral issues, and academic difficulties, many also develop resilience, independence, and strong bonds

with their single parent. The quality of the parent-child relationship and the level of available support are crucial factors influencing the child's well-being.

There are several key aspects of psychological development that have been studied in relation to single parenting as (Kelly, 2023) has postulated; parents in his view, who do not spend time with their children will not be aware of the children's developmental milestones. This includes emotional development, which involves the child's ability to regulate and express their emotions in a healthy way. Kelly (2023) further stated that cognitive development encompasses a child's capacity to think, learn, and solve problems.

Research on the effects of single parenting on child psychological development began in the 1970s and has continued to grow since then. Studies in this area have generally focused on three main questions: How does single parenting affect children's adjustment and well-being? How do different factors, such as the child's age, gender, and the circumstances of the separation, influence the child's adjustment, and what can be done to promote positive outcomes for children in single-parent families? The family structure plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychological development of children, with the presence of both parents traditionally considered essential for optimal child well-being. (Santrock, 2024) has the option that the child's development is in early childhood. According to him experiences with parents and family relationships clearly shape development.

However, in recent decades, changes in societal norms, economic factors, and cultural shifts have led to an increase in single-parent households worldwide. In Nigeria, as in many other countries, single parenting has become a prevalent family structure, presenting unique challenges and opportunities for child development. Sokoto Metropolis represents the entire Sokoto state in this study, located in Sokoto State, Nigeria, reflects this trend, with a notable proportion of families headed by single parents.

The implications of single parenting on single parenting are becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary societies, leading to significant interest in its effects on child psychological development. According to Amato (2005), the rise in single-parent households has been attributed to various factors such as divorce, separation, and out-of-wedlock births. In Nigeria, like many other countries, the incidence of single parenting is on the rise due to socio-economic factors, cultural shifts, and changes in family structures (Omololu, 2020). Child psychological development in the metropolis is of particular

interest due to its potential impact on the future well-being and success of children within the community.

### **Theoretical perspectives**

This study explored the connection between single parenting and child psychological development in Sokoto Metropolis, Nigeria. The study adopted the social capital theory, as the theory has emphasized on the role of social relationships and community resources, individual support and well-being particularly in urban settings which is typical of the urban settings in Sokoto metropolis. The theory posits that social networks and relationships are similar to economic capital and that individuals or group's social networks and relationships are a valuable form of capital. The theory emphasizes strong ties within a homogeneous close-knit group, like the extended African family system, by providing emotional and solidarity support.

### **Concept of Single Parenting**

Van-Gasse and Mortelmans (2020), described a single parent as a single mother or a single father, a lone parent, where the individual could be a divorcee or a widow or widower, separated from their partner and or as result of an unplanned pregnancy; or the individual could be a single parent by choice, where a man or woman chooses to become a single parent through donor insemination or adoption, living with one or more dependent children without the presence and support of an adult partner sharing the responsibility of parenting.

Buchanan & Maccoby (2021), defined Single parenting as a means of raising a child or children without the support of a spouse or partner who lives with them. It can involve various situations, such as being divorced, widowed, separated, or never having been married. The key characteristic is the absence of a co-parenting partner within the household.

Single parenting happens as a result of divorce, or death of one parent; model parenting therefore, takes place in an ideal family setting. Single-parent households can present unique psychological challenges and opportunities for children's development. While some children may exhibit negative outcomes like increased anxiety, aggression, or academic difficulties, others may develop greater independence and resilience. The impact varies based on

factors like the child's age, the reason for single parenthood (e.g., divorce, death, or never-married), and the availability of support systems. Several studies have found a reduction in academic performance, motivation, and creativity among those growing up in single-parent households. Children were more likely to drop out, have poorer grades, and get jobs outside of school. The socio-economic status of single-parent families and the parents' lack of participation in school activities might be the reason for reduced academic performance. Compared to the children whose fathers were less involved, higher paternal involvement in school was associated with better academic function and behavior, including higher scores, fewer absences, and a positive attitude towards school. Children from divorced homes have less language stimulation, are more likely to have lower grades, are made to repeat a year of school, have low math and science scores, and are more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities. There is an ongoing gap between children of divorced parents and continuously married parents in various aspects. Clark and Canadian (2013) are of the view that single-parenting households have a negative impact on children as compared to positive impact. Immediately after parental divorce, separation, or remarriage, when children cope with the new situation and confusion, they experience emotional distress, anxiety, depression, and behavior problems such as anger, resentment, and noncompliance. These responses diminish as time passes in most children, but a few experiences delayed effects; they appear to adjust well in the early stages but have difficulties later. Hetherington and Elmor (2023), observed that Children of single parents develop negative feelings about themselves and have a feeling of being unwanted, at the same time harboring reduced self-esteem, while constantly comparing themselves with children living with both parents due to the absence of another parent.

A few decades ago, death of the spouse used to be the common cause of the rise in single-parent households, whereas now there's a rise in other reasons for single parent-hood such as parental divorce, parental separation, unplanned pregnancy, (Fam, 2021) and choice to be a single parent by adoption or donor insemination. Studies have suggested that the loss of a parent by separation is associated with psychological impacts.

A single parent can be a single mother or a single father of parent, where the individual is a divorcee or a widow/widower, separated from their partner and unplanned pregnancy, or could be a single parent by choice, where a man or woman chooses to become a single parent through donor, semination or

adoption living with one or more dependency children without the presence and support of an adult partner sharing the responsibility of parenting.

### **Psychological Development of the Child**

Development is a process of changing life from infancy to adulthood. Development can also be interpreted as a continuous process of physical and psychological change towards maturity. According to Yusuf (2020), Psychological development can be interpreted as a process of change towards maturity in the mental aspects experienced by the child. Thus, Istaty (2016) agreed. From this explanation, it can be concluded that the psychological development of the child is a change that exists in children in an effort to reach maturity.

### **Impact on Behavior and Emotional Well-being**

A child's psychological development includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. First, cognitive development, the child experiences a change from the pre-operational stage to the concrete stage; this is further characterized by a more mature thinking ability and the ability to read and write, all influenced by the environment. Next stage, is affective development, which is characterized by the ability to control emotions and body language, when he conducted research on marital roles, family and gender issues Browne (2020), discovered that and stressed that a parent is a caregiver and caretaker of the child therefore, proper attention should be given to the child until the end of adolescence. For these reasons, attention has been drawn towards parental guidance between conception and the end of adolescence, as the individual experience socialization problem which leads to social vices such as drugs, armed robbery cultism, Child development could be an important communication link among family members within this period. A biological parent consists of a person whose gamete resulted in a grandparents or other family members. Some children however, prefer their mothers, as they are more involved with them than their fathers; mother is a primary caregiver and as the child spends time with her, it develops a stronger and more familiar bond. In a body of research on the psychological wellbeing of children in single -mother families formed by divorce, it is constantly shown that children whose parents are divorced are more likely to exhibit emotional and behavioral problems than their counterparts in normal homes. (Amato, 2000, 2001, 2005) Because of this, they argue, mothers outshine

fathers who tend to be and have a 50% genetic overlap. A woman can also become a parent through surrogacy; towards the preference of parent depending on how involved a particular parent, single parenthood is defined by (Calhoun, 2022), as a multifocal family composed of a stigmatization regardless of how it was obtained. As such, the children faced developmental problems. The mother views dependent one or more of her grown children and her children or mothers as the expressive role players, who provided the emotional support and nurturing that biologically related to the child. Children without adoptive parents can be raised by their Single parent children commonly experience difficulties in identifying the role strain and stricter and more distant. She goes on to express that one of a woman's expressive roles is that of sometimes other relatives such as a grandmother or aunt.

There is a common tradition in the philosophy of the African culture that believes the responsibility of caring for the child is a collective activity. The traditional family structures, more so, the extended families support system enhances resilience by fostering a strong sense of emotional security (Diniz *et al.*, 2021). However, Mulumba and Carvalho 2024, hence pointed out that when the family support system breaks down, particularly in urban settings, it is the children from single parent home that bear the brunt by facing heightened emotional stress, feeling abandoned insecure and powerless.

Halimi and Lerner (2016), have observed that children from single parent homes do not have the same resources as children from regular family households; this, they maintain may lead to problems like mental disorder, risk of substance abuse and yearning for affection. Therefore, children from such homes are more likely to become delinquent progressive. Ogunkan (2024) has contended that such children navigate an environment that is fraught with challenges that include substance abuse and criminal activities. However, there are positive impact of children brought -up in a single-family setting, such children are taught by their single parents to resilient and balance the needs of others and at the same time work hard towards achieving their own goals (Sangeet and Singh, 2022).

The study randomly selected Yakubu Mu'azu primary school in the Year 2022-2023, the justification for school selection is that the school is situated in the center of the metropolis and the year selected is closer to this study period. The sample for this research and aimed and found out the psychological developmental effects of single parenting on the child, in Sokoto metropolis.

The study utilized a descriptive method of research where the questionnaires contained the descriptors of single parenting; it was revealed that the highest mean in this category was stating that the child feels unhappy with an incomplete family or separation of parents. The lowest mean of which provides that the child also shows a negative emotional profile; the developmental effect of single parenting in the child had the highest mean of where the child demonstrates difficulty in developing personal identity and displays physical stress from taking over the responsibilities. And the lowest mean of stated that the child acts aggressively there was a significant difference between the psychological and developmental effects of single parenting when analyzed according to age, sex, and socioeconomic there was no significant difference between the psychological and developmental effect of single parenting when analyzed according to father with a mean of and a mean of for mother. Hence, it is concluded that the demographic profile of age, sex, and socio-economic status establishes the significantly that the age group between 7-12 years can express emotions and accept parental separation better than adolescents who are worse affected by parental separation and find it difficult to accept the change.

### **Recommendations**

Single parents can adopt various strategies to support their children's psychological well-being in order to help them thrive in spite of challenges, this study therefore recommends the following strategies:

The government should develop and implement comprehensive support services for single-parent families, focusing on both practical and emotional assistance.

- i. There should be more job creations in the country in order to curb the suffering of families, which results in divorce cases.
- ii. The extended family should be fully involved in the activities of children from broken home relatives and render financial and moral support when needed.
- iii. Parents should also endeavor to stay together, despite all odds in order to safe guide the welfare of their children.

## **Conclusion**

Single parenting can be negative or positive however, in spite of the effect it has on children, they can grow up happily, successful and well-adjusted. Thus, this study concluded that single parents can raise children successfully with excellent overall development in their emotional and social lives. In northern Nigeria, single parenting is becoming more common as a result of death of a spouse or divorce. Sokoto state is a town in northern Nigeria with predominantly Muslim inhabitants, therefore there are no rampant cases of gender roles, inequality or acceptance of different genders which might become hazy or cases of single parenting by choice or out of wed-lock. However, cases of single parenting are found as a result of parental abuse, divorce, abandonment and or separation. The study randomly selected Yakubu Mu'azu primary school in the Year 2022-2023, the justification for school selection is that the school is situated in the center of the metropolis and the year selected is closer to this study period. The sample for this research aims to find out the psychological and developmental effects of single parenting on the students, in Sokoto metropolis. The study utilized a descriptive method of research where the questionnaires contained the descriptors of single parenting. The study revealed that the highest mean in this category was stating that the child feels unhappy with an incomplete family or separation of parents. The lowest mean of which provides that the child also shows a negative emotional profile the developmental effect of single parenting in the child had the highest mean of where the child demonstrates difficulty in developing personal identity and displays physical stress from taking over the responsibilities. And the lowest mean of stated that the child acts aggressively there was a significant difference between the psychological and developmental effects of single parenting when analyzed according to age, sex, and socioeconomic there was no significant difference between the psychological and developmental effect of single parenting when analyzed according to father with a mean of and a mean of for mother. The findings showed a significant relationship between single parenting and adolescent psychosocial wellbeing, influenced by factors such as financial constraints, stress levels, and family support systems. Hence, the demographic profile of age, sex, and socio-economic status establishes the significant bond of single parents and their children; thus, this study concludes that, there are positive impact of children brought -up in a single-family setting, such children are taught by their single parents to be resilient and balance the needs of others and at the same time work hard towards achieving their own goals.

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